DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 613 TM 024 543

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TITLE	Making the A: How To Study for Tests. ERIC/AE Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-TM-95-10
PUB DATE	Oct 95
CONTRACT	RR93002002
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, The Catholic University of America, Department of Education, O'Boyle Hall, Washington, DC 20064 (free).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Instructional Materials (For Learner) (051) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Elementary Secondary Education; Essay Tests; *Learning Strategies; *Notetaking; Objective Tests; Organization; Planning; *Review (Reexamination); Study Habits; *Study Skills; Test Anxiety; *Test Wiseness
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Doing well on tests and earning good grades begin with good study habits. This digest offers a plan to help in preparing for tests. It explains how to study for and take tests. Organization, planning, and time management skills are essential to becoming a successful student. A good student reads assignments, listens during lectures, and takes good classroom notes that are reread and highlighted. Regular review reduces test anxiety and allows time for information to be absorbed. Review periods should be scheduled well in advance, with planned daily reviews, weekly reviews, and major reviews. For some subjects, study groups are an effective tool if groups are composed of dedicated students who set their agendas to avoid wasting time. On exam day, the student should arrive early and get organized. It is also important to pay attention to verbal directions as tests are distributed and to read the directions carefully. Scanning the entire test to notice how many points each section is worth is important. Specific advice is given for multiple-choice, true-false, open-book, short-answer, and essay tests. Four sources are listed for further reading. (SLD)

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ERIC/AE DIGEST
Department of Education
The Catholic University of America

EDO-TM-95-10 October 1995

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

EDO-TM-95-10 October 1995

Making the A: How To Study for Tests

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Tests are one method of measuring what you have learned in a course. Doing well on tests and earning good grades begin with good study habits. If your goal is to become a successful student, take the time to develop good study habits.

This digest offers a plan to help you study for tests. It explains how to prepare for and take tests. Techniques for taking essay, multiple choice and other types of exams are reviewed. Although these techniques may help you improve your test scores, other factors, such as class participation, independent projects and term papers also contribute toward grades.

Before the Test

Organization, planning and time management are skills essential to becoming a successful student; so start studying as soon as classes begin. Read assignments, listen during lectures and take good classroom notes. Then, reread the assignment, highlighting important information to study. Reviewing regularly allows you to avoid cramming and reduces test anxiety. The biggest benefit is it gives you time to absorb information.

Read difficult assignments twice. Sometimes a second reading will clarify concepts. If you are having difficulty with a subject, get help immediately. Meet with your instructor after class, use an alternate text to supplement required reading or hire a tutor (ask faculty members and other students for referrals).

Review, Review, Review

Plan ahead, scheduling review periods well in advance. Set aside one hour on a Saturday or Sunday to review several subjects. Keep your reviews short and do them often.

- **Daily reviews**--Conduct short before and after class reviews of lecture notes. Begin reviewing after your first day of class.
- **Weekly reviews**--Dedicate about 1 hour per subject to review assigned reading and lecture notes.
- **Major reviews**--Start the week before an exam and study the most difficult subjects when you are the most alert. Study for 2-5 hours punctuated by sufficient breaks.

Create review tools, such as flashcards, chapter outlines and summaries. This helps you organize and remember information as well as condense material to a manageable size. Use 3 x 5 cards to review important information. Write ideas, formulas, concepts and facts on cards to carry with you. Study on the bus, in waiting rooms or whenever you have a few extra minutes.

Another useful tool is a study checklist. Make a list of everything you need to know for the exam. The list should include a brief description of reading assignments, types of problems to solve, skills to master, major ideas, theories, definitions, and equations. When you begin your final study sessions, cross off items as you review them.

Study Groups

For some subjects, study groups are an effective tool. Study groups allow students to combine resources; members share an academic goal and provide support and encouragement. Such groups meet regularly to study and learn a specific subject.

To form a study group, look for dedicated students--students who ask and answer questions in class, and who take notes. Suggest to two or three that you meet to talk about group goals, meeting times and other logistics. Effective study groups are limited to five or six people. Test the group first by planning a one-time-only session. If that works, plan another. After several successful sessions, schedule regular meetings.

Set an agenda for each meeting to avoid wasting time. List the material that will be reviewed so members can come prepared. Also, follow a format. For example, begin by comparing notes to make sure you all heard the same thing and recorded important information. Spend 15-20 minutes conducting open-ended discussions on specific topics. Then, test each other by asking questions or take turns explaining concepts. Set aside 5-10 minutes to brainstorm possible test questions.

Taking an Exam

On exam day arrive early and get organized. Pay attention to verbal directions as tests are distributed. Read directions slowly. Scan the entire test, noticing how many points each part is worth and estimate the time needed for individual questions. Before you start answering questions, write down memory aids, formulas, equations, facts and other useful information in the margins.

Check the time and pace yourself. If you get stuck on a question

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try to remember a related fact. Start from the general and go to the specific. Look for answers in other test questions. Often a term, name, date or other fact you have forgotten will appear somewhere else in the test. Move on to the next question if memory aids do not help. You can always go back to the question if you have time.

Test-Taking Tips for Different Types of Exams

Multiple Choice--Check the directions to see if the questions call for more than one answer. Answer each question in your head before you look at the possible answers. If you can come up with the answer before you look at the choices you eliminate the possibility of being confused by them. Mark questions you can't answer immediately and come back to them later.

When taking a multiple-choice exam guess only if you are not penalized for incorrect answers. Use the following guidelines to make educated guesses.

- ❑ If two answers are similar, except for one or two words, choose one of these answers.
- ❑ If the answer calls for a sentence completion, eliminate the answers that would not form grammatically correct sentences.
- ❑ If answers cover a wide range (5, 76, 87, 109, 500) choose a number in the middle.

For machine-graded multiple-choice tests be certain that the answer you mark corresponds to the question you are answering. Check the test booklet against the answer sheet whenever you start a new section and again at the top of each column.

True-false--If any part of a true-false statement is false, the answer is false. Look for key words, i.e., qualifiers like all, most, sometimes, never or rarely. Questions containing absolute qualifiers such as always or never often are false.

Open book--When studying for this type of test, write down any formulas you will need on a separate sheet. Place tabs on important pages of the book so that you don't have to waste time looking for tables or other critical information. If you plan to use your notes, number them and make a table of contents. Prepare thoroughly for open-book tests. They are often the most difficult.

Short answer/fill-in-the-blank--These tests require students to provide definitions or short descriptions (typically a few words or a sentence or two). Study using flashcards with important terms and phrases. Key words and facts will then be familiar and easy to remember as you answer test questions.

Verbs Commonly Used in Essay Questions

Analyze	Examine
Compare	Explain
Contrast	Illustrate
Criticize	Interpret
Define	List
Describe	Outline
Discuss	Prove
Enumerate	State
Evaluate	Summarize

Essay--When answering an essay question, first decide precisely what the question is asking. If a question asks you to compare, do not explain. Standard essay question words are listed in Box 1. Look up any unfamiliar words in a dictionary.

Before you write your essay, make a quick outline. There are three reasons for doing this. First, your thoughts will be more organized (making it easier for your teacher to read), and you will be less likely to leave out important facts. Second, you will be able to write faster. Third, if you do not have time to finish your answer, you may earn some points with the outline. Don't forget to leave plenty of space between answers. You can use the extra space to add information if there is time.

When you write, get to the point. Start off by including part of the question in your answer. For example, if the question asks, "Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of universal health care coverage to both patients and medical professionals." Your first sentence might read, "Universal health care will benefit patients in the following ways." Expand your answer with supporting ideas and facts. If you have time, review your answers for grammatical errors, clarity and legibility.

Further Reading

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract RR93002002. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the U.S. Department of Education. **Permission is granted to copy and distribute this ERIC/AE Digest.**